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The philosophical and practical basis for peace-building in the Horn of Africa and beyond¹

Kelvin Harewood²

“If people are good only because they fear punishment and hope for reward, then we are a sorry lot indeed”.

(Albert Einstein)

Abstract

During the last decade and a half the world has witnessed an increasing presence of violence in both small and large scale political and social situations. These conflicts have been characterised by increasing violence inflicted by states against each other as well as within and between ethnic groups. Coupled with this, there is a growing realization that the Western model of society, despite its increasing global reach, economic, military, symbolic, political and epistemological hegemony, has failed to provide us with a meaningful and profound human solution to conflict resolution. This paper proposes an alternative approach to conflict resolution, based on the concept of a shared humanity and reconciliation which recognises the need to terminate conflicts in the interest of current and future generations. In doing so it proposes that in addressing the challenges of peace-building in Africa, that the concept of Ubuntu can be applied as an appropriate and indigenous device, - an African way - to resolve and manage conflicts at the micro and macro-levels in the north-eastern region of Africa and beyond.

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium, there was renewed hope that Africa's time had come and African leaders and citizens started to look to the future with renewed optimism. However while considerable progress have been made towards the achievement of peace and security, in many parts of the continent, progress

¹ This paper was presented at the Horn of Africa Workshop: What is the Way out: Challenges in Overcoming Governance Crises, Endemic Conflicts and Negative External Involvements in the Horn of Africa? The workshop took place May 26, 2008 at Aalborg University and was hosted by Development, Innovation and International Political Economy Research (DIIPER) in Collaboration with Centre for Comparative Integration Studies (CCIS), Aalborg University.

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remains threatened or impeded by conflict.³ Nowhere is this more concentrated than in the region of Africa referred to as the Horn of Africa, where the intensity of armed conflicts remains a matter of grave concern. The Horn consists of the following seven states, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti and Kenya and Uganda. In 2006, this region witnessed major escalations in several conflicts and a marked deterioration of governance in critical states.

It has been said that the Horn of Africa hosts the deadliest cluster of conflicts globally. Eight times as many people have died in the Horn's current wars (up to 2.5 billion) as have perished in the Balkans conflicts. No zone of regional conflict has produced more concentrated deaths and destruction since World War II. Hence in terms of sheer human life and the highest rate of population displacement in the world more is at stake in resolving the wars in the horn of Africa than in anywhere else in the world (Prendergast 1999: 2).

Currently there are four major conflicts running in the Horn of Africa, located in Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan with some direct or indirect linkages between them, making this regional cluster of conflicts, in many ways, an integrated conflict.

In the northern tier of the Horn, Ethiopia and Eritrea are engaged in a fratricidal feud in which thousands of their peoples perish each time there are major confrontations on their common contested border. In parts of Ethiopia there is also inter-communal fighting mainly over land and water taking place between the Murule and Garre communities and between the Borana and Gabra communities in north-eastern Kenya near the Ethiopian border.

In Somalia most of the conflict occurs between non-state armed groups who clash over the control of local areas. This conflict is both inter-clan and intra-clan in nature, involving sub-clans and factions, whereby factions continue to jostle for control of key towns, ports and agricultural areas. However with the rise of Union of Islamic courts (UIC) there is now also a conflict between Somali Islamists militias and warlords as well as the opposition to the Somali government which is hampering the reconstruction of a national transitional government. This has also amplified the prospects for regional conflict as Ethiopia and Eritrea have sent significant military support to opposing sides,

³ Conflict can be defined as 'the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups and can be classified as social, political, violent or non-violent. Social conflict refers to conflict between groups and political conflict is when the nature of the conflict is political. Non-violent conflict is expressed without the use of force and is seen by many as a natural element of human society and an essential driving force for social change. Violent conflict on the other hand poses a threat to society and can be argued to represent one of the central causes of poverty and 'failed development' (Chiwandamira & Fearnley).

creating Ethiopia-Eritrea proxy battles in Somalia. In turn Somali militias have launched cross-border attacks against Ethiopia and have supported Ethiopian oppositionists, while Ethiopian troops have launched assaults into Somalia to create a protective buffer zone.

The war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has led both governments to increase their military support to rival proxies in Somalia. This has led to the continued ignition of conflicts and the re-legitimisation of warlords in Somalia, destroying hopes for internal peace. As such the greater threat of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea today arises from their recent and rapidly expanding military involvement in Somalia and there are fears that Somalia could end up as the battleground for armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the near future. (Lyons 2006: 17) Large scale war would be disastrous for the region with the potential to create instability in Djibouti and Kenya.

In Sudan, the civil war is said to be the deadliest conflict in the world and the longest in the region. It has lasted more than twenty-five in which rebel groups from the south, east and west, fight the Government of Sudan for a mixed bag of agendas including equal rights, democracy, self-determination for the south and a secular state. Here the central focus of fighting is the attempt by the south, usually described as African and Christian or animist to gain autonomy or outright independence from the north, usually described as Arab and Islamist. The violence in Darfur also continues unabated and spills over into neighbouring Chad.

These major wars in the Horn also have political roots. For example Ethiopia seeks to protect its security, while Eritrea seeks to assert its sovereignty. The Sudan government is promoting Islamic rule while the Sudanese rebel groups are pressing for equal rights and self-determination. The Somalis fight for clan rights. In Sudan we also witness a government policy of low-intensity ethnic cleansing of African populations in Southern Sudan and Nuba Mountains which is driven by its efforts to acquire additional prime land for Arab farmers as well as clear civilians away from oil production and pipeline facilities.

The impact of conflict in the Horn of Africa

The stalemate on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border feeds and in turn, is fed by growing authoritarianism in both states which rely on force to stay in power. In both states the ruling parties have responded to demands for political openings with harsh restrictions and arrests (ibid: 3). These arrests have included major opposition politicians, civil society leaders and journalists, which effectively criminalises dissent. In Ethiopia there is also a vacuum of political authority in Ethiopian cities in which the main opposition alliances have been shattered and

divided into mutually suspicious factions (ibid: 14). To further complicate matters in Ethiopia, the blurring of lines between domestic electoral opposition and armed groups linked to Eritrea, damages prospects for a democratic transition in Ethiopia and makes political reconciliation even more difficult. In Eritrea, it has been reported that space for civil society activism is severely restricted and access to information is greatly reduced, with political change and the most basic respect for political and civil rights desperately needed (ibid: 11). The arrest of leading opposition politicians and civil society leaders has immobilized political developments, leaving the regimes fragile and the border conflicts also exacerbates a rapidly escalating domestic political crisis in Somalia.

Ironically, with regards to the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict it has been suggested that resolving the border dispute will have a positive and far-reaching impact. For example, in Ethiopia it will reduce the links between Ethiopia's internal opposition and regional rivalries, making domestic political accommodation more likely. For Eritrea, removing the core issue can allow public discussions and diplomatic dialogues on a broader range of issues, including long-postponed elections, restrictions on media and civil society (ibid: 8).

The major fear for this region is that these heightened border tensions, along with internal political turmoil in Ethiopia and increasing political repression in Eritrea, and recent developments in Somalia raise the likelihood of heightened instability in the Horn of Africa, that could lead to a significant loss of life. Furthermore, that the Ethiopian-Eritrean proxy conflict increases the opportunities for terrorist infiltration of the Horn of Africa and East Africa and/or ignition of a larger regional conflicts.

The Cost of Conflict in Horn of Africa

The consequences of these conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long term stability and prosperity and peace for its peoples. Armed conflict –along with large population of displaced people and refugees- has been identified as a major factor in slowing down the achievements of development goals. The resources spent on warfare could, if redirected, make a significant contribution to addressing development targets. Political and governance systems, investment and economic growth in Africa are at risks due to wars and other civil conflicts.

It has resulted in massive displacement sometimes of whole populations, making millions homeless. The social fabric and coping mechanisms of society are affected and the return to normal community life can take years following the

destruction of social institutions and ways of life.⁴ It has exacerbated divisions between groups, increasing intra-group insecurity and hostility and also disrupts inter-group relations. It is destroying or altering traditional political institutions and changes power relations and national institutions. State structures are steadily eroding and there is a disconnection between state and civil society. Regional stability and security are jeopardised as national disputes frequently spill over or threatened to spill over borders.

Regionally, in resolving conflict, military authority has replaced traditional authority, reducing the prospects for local approaches to peace. In absence of traditional means to resolve disputes, the use of modern weaponry has accelerated the transfer of assets from the politically weak to the politically strong. In some cases, these weapons helped to destroy the remnants of balanced reciprocity.⁵ According to M. Muchie (1989: 14) “most African states strive to assert hegemony based on force rather than ideological legitimacy... states become weaker the more they try to resolve insecurity by bureaucratic atrophy and military force... the weak post-colonial state takes measures and policies that multiply the anguish of peoples, widen the wounds of society and encourage the ultimate breakdown of societal fabric”. As a result it was noted that the weapons of death change the fabric of life and power, which from time immemorial in African society has accrued with age, suddenly comes from the barrel of a gun. Village elders who once mulled every crucial decision are today deferring to armed ‘youth elders’, who are often governed by hot blood.⁶

In totality, societies are becoming brutalised as a direct consequence of these prolonged and violent conflicts and the images of ethnic wars, dictatorships, political failures and famine which predominate, tarnishes the view of Africa in the eyes of outsiders, whereby Africans are seen as objects rather than actors. The potential contributions of Africa and African values are often lost. This has led to the realisation that there is now a pressing need to invigorate efforts to end wars and violent conflicts in Africa and to build peace by building new relationships between communities split by militarised borders, groups displaced by conflicts, and families divided by loyalties to rival states (Lyons 2006: 5).

⁴ Source: Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Costs and Causes of Conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa:
http://www.caii-dc.com/CAIISTaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIISTaff/Dashboard_CAIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm.pg. 2.

⁵ Source: *ibid*: pg. 8.

⁶ Washington Post Foreign Service, July 8, 2001 cited in eParliamentIDL (2003) ARMED CONFLICTS REPORT 2003 “Background Paper on Kenya. “Is Kenya still Considered a Conflict Zone”, pg. 3.

Root causes and sources of conflict in Africa

The root causes of armed conflict in Africa have been the subject of much debate since the causes are numerous and interconnected, ranging from individual or group volition, to structural inequality and injustice. Internal factors or systemic causes cited are geophysical conditions, resources scarcity⁷, poverty, socio-economic inequalities, ethnic divisions and the militarisation of society. The sources of conflict are also equally debated as they reflect the diversity and complexity of Africa's past and present. Some sources are purely internal, some reflect the dynamics of a particular sub-region and some have important international dimensions. Hence while some causes of conflict are local, others are the result of transformations in the international structure such as the end of the cold war.⁸

Unfortunately the nature of the violence has been poorly understood. This misunderstanding often occurs when conflicts in Africa are attributed strictly to "tribal warfare" or ethnic conflicts⁹ and Western analysts attempt to place the burden of violence on sociological factors inherent to Africa.¹⁰ For example,

⁷ It has been noted that while resources may be a factor in some conflicts that it is not always because of the lack of resources. The point being that conflict may also occur where there is abundance of a resource. In most cases the cause is the lack of institutional capacity by governments to manage and better supervise these resources. Source: Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Costs and Causes of Conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa: http://www.caii-dc.com/CAIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIStaff/Dashboard_CAIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm

⁸ It has been noted that as states formed throughout the post-colonial Greater Horn, Cold war imperatives influenced the policies of external actors towards the region. Although states and their associated social welfare systems received plentiful resources, aid was accompanied by hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance which reinforced repressive security apparati and legitimised divide-and-rule governing policies. The north-east of the Greater Horn was targeted because it is close to the Persian Gulf and Red Sea with its oil traffic and strategic importance. (ibid: 6).

⁹ Whether conflicts are caused by differences ascribed to ethnicity is hotly debated but that they are a contributing cause and are routinely exploited is undeniable (ibid: 11).

¹⁰ Source: Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Costs and Causes of Conflict in the Greater Horn of

http://www.caii-dc.com/CAIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIStaff/Dashboard_CAIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm pg.11.

In contrast to the stereotypes of ethnic conflicts in Africa, it has been proposed that Africa's great ethnic diversity actually reduces, rather than increases, the chances of conflict occurring and that rather than seeing diverse cultures as a source of divisions, it is seen as a source of strength and richness for the community possessing it. The suggestion being that cultural diversity fosters respect, understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures. As such, cultural diversity moves away from the notion of tolerance, to mutual respect and understanding. Cultural diversity can facilitate the creation of a stable and

when the Cold War ended, there was some initial optimism that armed conflicts in Africa would decline with the absence of the old ideological divides between East and West. As a result political and economic researchers began to look at non-ideological factors such as ethnic and economic competition. (Harch 2007: 8) However some analysts in attempting to locate the origins of much of the levels of inter-group enmity and violent conflict amongst states, have approached the conflicts in the broader historical or development process and considered issues such as state formation, the disconnection between social organizations and the state in the post-colonial era and the role of rapid market-oriented reforms such as structural adjustment policies, in generating instability and in turn violent conflict.¹¹

With regards to the significance of state formation, in Africa, many of the peoples of the post-colonial world have constituted themselves as nations and states based on the western political model. Furthermore it is noted that the colonial state in Africa was not constituted to or from the needs of these communities ... or an expansion of liberty at the base of society (Muchie 1989: 14). In other words, the process which forms the modern nation state did not occur naturally, but was rather an artificial process, through the coerciveness of European colonialism. Hence in the context of Africa, the peoples of the continent were denied any peaceful process of socio-political evolution.¹² It represented a forced African unity or integration which has been at the expense of various nationalities and peoples' distinctive identities, interests and aspirations and was based on domination by small ruling classes belonging to one ethnic group.¹³ Accordingly Kofi Annan - UN General Secretary – in a report on African conflict, states that it was “the authoritarian legacies of

peaceful environment by promoting co-existence and understanding of diverse cultures. (See also http://www.incp-ipc.org/meetings/2004/faq_safrica_e.shtml)

¹¹ See Storey (1999), Economics and Ethnic Conflict: Structural Adjustment in Rwanda” Development Policy Review, Vol.17 pp.43-63 cited in Chinwandamira & Fearnely (2006) See also Laurie Nathan who proposed that four structural conditions, in particular, constitute an intra-state crisis: authoritarian rule; the exclusion of sectors of society on basis of ethnicity, religion or other form of identity; socio-economic deprivation and inequality; and weak states in the sense of lacking the institutional capacity to manage political and social conflict. (Nathan: 3) Others have cited the anti-colonial struggles which endured for many years as having had a very destructive impact on social and political life and hence current tensions in several African countries cannot be fully understood without reference to these early struggles. The militarization of societies and the social tensions which these create often linger long after violence have subsided.

¹² Ali Jimale ((2000) “The Invention of Somalia” cited in Fowsia Abdulkadir’s paper 2004

¹³ Source: Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Costs and Causes of Conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa:

http://www.caii-dc.com/CAIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIStaff/Dashboard_CAIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm, pg.11.

colonialism which helped to produce the “winner-takes-all” and highly personalised forms of governance seen in parts of the continent ... with the frequent lack of peaceful means to change or replace leadership and the “often violent politicisation of ethnicity”, ... conflict becomes virtually inevitable”.¹⁴

Pitfalls of the Nation-State: Enmity and intra-state relations

There are several pitfalls associated with the western political model of the nation-state, which African societies have inherited as a result of their colonial past. According to some analysts the political model¹⁵ of the nation-state, by its very definition has been instrumental in the types of relationships that have developed and which exist between nations and states. On the one hand the nation-state has been described as closed, impermeable, and sovereign units completely separated from all other states, each in full control of all its territory, people and resources, within its boundaries¹⁶ (Wolfers 1965: 19). On the other hand it has also been associated with attributes such as, an ideology of domination, centralism, arrogant bureaucracy and latent capacity for repression (Lambert 1991: 9).¹⁷ Significantly this ideology of domination, gives rise to the potential for enmity in the multi-state system.

On this basis, it has been suggested that the multi-state system consisting of multiple sovereigns has made it very difficult to envisage any sense of cohesion in the relations between states. It is a system which conformed to a western tradition of many centuries and much of thinking of international politics and relations between states has been predicated on the continuing primary role of nation-states within multiparty systems and on the persistence of modes of behaviour within the system. (Wolfers 1965: xvi) For example, one feature of the multi-state relations has been the “state-as-sole-actor” approach which had until recently had become firmly entrenched as mode of operation, in the

¹⁴ Secretary General Kofi Annan cited in Salim Lone (August 1998) Africa Recovery. Vol.12\1. See also Basil Davidson (1992) who referred to this form of state behaviour as “top-down commandism” which repudiated Africa’s democratic tradition” and produced “a concerted aggression against the common people”.

¹⁵ It was noted that after the Napoleonic wars, nation-states, particularly the European “great powers” as they were called, replaced the image of the princes or kings of former centuries as the sovereign, independent single-minded actors, the movers of world events. These nation-states were ascribed the acts that accounted for changes in the distribution of power, for alignment and counter-alignments, for expansion and colonial conquest, for war and peace... (Wolfers 1965: 4).

¹⁶ It is worth noting that national territorial units, in the age of globalisation, nuclear weapons, long range missiles and earth satellites, are outdated and on the way out. (ibid xvi).

¹⁷ Also see Basil Davidson 1992. “African and the Curse of the Nation-State”, where he questions the legitimacy and efficacy of the African nation-state, where he sees angry citizenry alienated from the predatory leadership that governs them.

relation between states. Hence it has been suggested that in the multi-state system, the reasons for enmity are so plentiful and various that stable friendships between all the members of the system can hardly be more than an exception. As long as there are conflicting aims, there will be instances of enmity. This continued presence of enmity has resulted in a Hobbesian-view of the societies which assumes that all states were equally and constantly driven by fear that their survival, the most cherished of their state possession, might be threatened and then the multi-state system would of necessity become an all-round struggle for security (ibid: 12) In this environment, peace is continually being threatened to the stage of conflict when physical coercion, by one side or both, becomes a practical possibility. (ibid: 30) Consequently, societies become crippled by fear, sabre-rattling and runaway military budgets.

It has further been argued that the “state-of-sole-actor” approach was a highly abstract game and was distinct by its a-human interest in prestige, power and the like, rather than genuine human needs (ibid: 5). In other words, that states tended to lose sight of the human beings, of the individuals who comprise a state for whom and by whom policy may be construed even in what may be called national interest. Subsequently the abstract notion of the state also tended to be devoid of or immune to human sentiment, becoming characterised by a nationalistic age which served to distort human patterns of values¹⁸ (ibid: 6).

Legacy of the Nation-state: Intra-state and inter-group conflict

African states have inherited many of the pitfalls associated with the western political model of the nation state. In the Horn of Africa, some conflicts have remained unresolved because of the refusal to compromise on vital issues such as territoriality, legitimacy and identity (Lyons 2006: 6). Generally, in post-colonial Africa, people have become totally alienated from the state and states are seen as partnerships of predatory elites.¹⁹ For example with regards to the vital links between civil society and the state, both Ethiopia and Eritrea, have been overly restrictive regarding freedom of expression and association, leading to fewer independent voices that in future will create constituencies of peace advocacy. According to Shivji (1986), in the context of post-colonial nation-

¹⁸ For example, ,Arnold Wolfers (1965) noted that the elements that go into processes of power distribution, of conflict and conflict resolution, of alignment and de-alignment, are not peculiar to a multistate system but can be observed in the relationships and activities of juvenile gangs , university faculties, trade unions and a host of other groups of human beings (Wolfers xvi).

¹⁹ Source: Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Costs and Causes of Conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa:
http://www.caii-dc.com/CAIISTaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIISTaff/Dashboard_CAIIAdminDatabase/resources/ghai/costcaus.htm, pg.14.

building ideologies, the state itself was a replica of the colonial tyrannical state. (Cited in Abdulkadir 2004).

This entrenchment of power and the manipulation of ethnic identity by elites, has also been a major driving force, whereby colonial rulers and their successors have fuelled tensions by deliberately favouring certain racial, ethnic or religious groups at the expense of others. These divide-and-rule strategies have created enduring economic, political and social inequalities that help to kindle continuing cycles of rebellion and repression. Essentially government weaknesses coupled with the manipulation of the ethnic fabric of the region gradually produced an alarming shift in the nature of the conflict, with ethnicity becoming a major mobilizing factor. In the colonial and post-colonial period, the customary role of elders as peacemakers, in many places became subject to party ideology and political manipulation.²⁰ Hence throughout the Horn of Africa, overdeveloped military institutions remain fixtures and the legacies of shoot-first approach often serve to undercut other positives agendas (Pendergras 1999: 3).

Conflict resolution and Peace-building approaches

Every society since the beginning of time has developed its own mechanism and institutions for managing, disputes in a way that preserves the integrity and fabric of society (*albeit with various degrees of success (Authors emphasis)* Murithi 2006: 2). For example, environmentalist contend that the way governments behave in foreign affairs ,can be explained by reference to the culture of their people (their national character) and that decision-makers tend to conform to the demands of this culture, of its taboos, whether they have internalised them or made them part of their own individual disposition (Wolfers 1965: 40).

Currently much of the concepts of conflict²¹ resolution strategy that is predominant is derived from a western world-view and assumes that conflicts can be resolved successfully on the basis of reward and punishment.²² This is

²⁰ Ibid. pg 8.

²¹ In this paper the view taken is that conflict whether social or political is inevitable and normal in all societies which comprise of diverse groups, whether defined by class, ethnicity, religion or politics. It agrees with the view of Laurie Nathan, that conflict is a natural consequence of fundamental change and expression of a desired fundamental change, and that the challenge lies in managing it in a constructive fashion, that is , in non-violent ways that enjoy the consent of citizens. States which are stable are not free of conflict but rather are able to deal with its various manifestations in this manner (Nathan pg. 2).

²² On face value this strategy of reward and punishment appears to be supported and informed by scientific research on the psychology of human behaviour and relationships.

based on the general proposition that aggression will be repeated unless it is punished. (ibid: xiv) A concrete expression of this approach is continually witnessed in the crudeness of language introduced in verbal exchanges between unfriendly governments. There are many pitfalls noted about this approach. One of the pitfalls of this approach is that it serves to increase the level of enmity between the nations in conflict and also generates pressure on other members of the multi-state system to take sides. It has also been noted that another drawback of this approach is that instead of deterring an opponent from taking action, for which they have the capability, it may lead to preparations so massive that hostile action by opponents is provoked rather than prevented (ibid: 31). Furthermore, the difficulty for this approach is that within its normative structure the public nature of the conflict may undermine the credibility of either party in each other's eyes and in the eyes of outsiders. Depending on the context of the termination of the conflict, it may either be honourable or shameful; it may be interpreted as a sign of strength or of weakness (Binsbergen 1999: 5). What appears to be lacking in this approach is potential for any form of reconciliation as a device to resolve or prevent the escalation of conflict in more humanly and profound ways. The suggestion being that peace and reconciliation may be guided by the general notion that peace can be made enduring only if the enmities of yesterday are surmounted in a spirit of generosity (Wolfers 1965: xiv).

Reconciliation and peace-making and peace-building

Reconciliation is an essential aspect of all human relations, both in primary human relations based on face to face interaction, and in group relations of a political, religious and ethnic nature, which encompasses a large number of people and is usually a public rather than private event (Binsbergen 1999: 1). It has the capacity to humanise conflict resolution and peace building by attracting attention to the human element, which has become side-lined in the traditional western model of approach. It replaces the abstract notion of the state with the living realities of human minds, wills and hearts. Essentially, the benefits of reconciliation is that society is newly constituted not only on the concrete basis of the regained unity of parties before daggers are drawn, but also on a much more general and abstract level, which is the reconstitution of social community

For example, research findings have demonstrated that children, for example, are more likely to clean their teeth if promised rewards than if threatened with the painful consequences of neglecting their teeth. This evidence has been theorised at a level of generalized knowledge in international relations to suggest that human behaviour is human behaviour, on whatever level of social intercourse and under whatever circumstances that it occurs. However it was noted that it remains questionable to then generalise about the respective chances of influencing dictators by threats of deprivation or promises of gratification (Wolfers 1965 xv).

in terms of shared humanity It is this confession of shared humanity which is the essence of reconciliation which creates the conditions to arrange the concrete practical details of the conflict, once terminated, on the basis of trust (ibid: 5). However in order to be effective there are certain requirements that have to be met in reconciliation. For example, there must be an expressed recognition by the parties concerned that there is specific, explicitly expressed conflict; that the conflict is clearly and publicly discussed by those involved; and that such discussions create a clarity which may well have a beneficial influence on future relations (ibid: 3).

Ubuntu a cultural device for reconciliation and peace-making

The international community has not had great success in peacemaking and peace building²³ on the continent of Africa. It is therefore important that African peace educators do not derive their theories mostly from Western peace educators, but search in their own heritage for an African way to deal with conflicts (Brock-Utne:4). African societies did develop extraordinary effective means through which to prepare reconciliation²⁴ and to bring it about and these have pre-dated colonialism and continue to function today. This is evident in the African concept of Ubuntu²⁵ an innate capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Philosophically, Ubuntu is based on one of the fundamental assumptions of African philosophy²⁶ in the belief of a relational universe where the visible and the invisible connote and echo one another, where there is no discontinuity between the two realms. As exemplified in African traditional religions²⁷ there

²³ Peace- building refers to the full spectrum of intervention that is focused on restoring relations between groups that have been in conflict. It involves a number of different aspects, which may include forgiveness, cooperation, negotiation, mediation, facilitation, creation of mutual understanding and /or reconciliation (Chiwandamira & Fearnley 2006: 15).

²⁴ Dani Nabudere proposes that reconciliation as a philosophy and practice is not peculiar to the African peoples alone. It is an essential element in most human relationships in all human societies. Here it is concerned with the manner in which reconciliation is conceived and practiced by African societies under the philosophy of Ubuntu (Nabudere: 7).

²⁵ Ubuntu as an innate capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness exists in various forms throughout African societies, though not always known as Ubuntu, which is the Zulu expression of that capacity.

²⁶ Masolo, 1994: suggested that in speaking of African philosophy does not mean essentializing the African experience as being unique and valid outside actual lived experiences and histories. (Cited in Dani Nabudere: pg. 2).

²⁷ While Western humanism tends to underestimate or even deny the importance of religious belief, Ubuntu African Humanism is resiliently religious (Prinsloo, 1955: 4) For the Westerner, the maxim "A person is a person through other persons" has no obvious

is no formal distinction between the spiritual and material areas of life. As such this conception of the world is based on the unity of all things, which existentially links all beings and makes them interdependent at all levels of the Cosmos. It is a cultural worldview that tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human.

Again, philosophically this notion of interdependence can be contrasted to other traditions such as the Descartes²⁸ notion of “I think, therefore I am” as oppose to Ubuntu’s “I am because you are”.²⁹ In fact Ubuntu directly contradicts the Cartesian conception of individuality³⁰ in terms in which the individual or self can be conceived without thereby necessarily conceiving the other. The Cartesian individual exists prior to, or separately and independently from the rest of society and where the rest of society is nothing but an added extra to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being.³¹ Hence where definitions of personality³² in the West emphasise the uniqueness and the insularity of the individual, African definitions emphasise the interconnectedness between people rather than focusing on the separateness, uniqueness or individuality of people³³. Ubuntu societies place a high value on communal life, and maintaining positive relations within the society is a collective task in which everyone is involved. (Murithi 2006:29) With regards to conflict resolution or peace-making, as part of African heritage, Ubuntu considers that one’s humanity is inextricably bound with that of others and as such “unforgiveness”³⁴ is conceived as not being fully human. Hence in seeking to resolve conflict, Ubuntu is a philosophy that seeks to find a

religious connotations. He or she will probably interpret it as nothing but a general appeal to treat others with respect and decency. However, in African tradition this maxim has a deeply religious meaning. The person one is to become “through other persons” is, ultimately, an ancestor. And, by the same token, these “other persons” include ancestors. Ancestors are extended family. (Van Niekerk, 1994: 2, Ndaba, 1994: 13-14 in Dirk Louw pg. 2).

²⁸ René Descartes (1596-1650) is widely regarded as the father of modern philosophy. *I think therefore I am* (Latin: *cogito ergo sum*; French: *je pense, donc je suis*).

²⁹ This is enshrined in the Zulu maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” i.e. “a person is a person through other persons”.

³⁰ Teffo (1994a: 7) notes that the African conception of ‘man’ does not negate individuality. It merely discourages the view that the individual should take precedence over community. (Cited in Dirk Louw: 4).

³¹ Cf. Macquarrie, 1972: 104) cited in Dirk Louw: pg.4.

³² The African view of personality denies that a person can be described solely in terms of the physical and psychological properties. In terms of self-definition, it is with reference to community that a person is defined. Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood.

³³ “Rhythmic Patterns in African Personality” Source: <http://www.africawithin.com/akbar/rhythmic.htm>, pg.1

³⁴ According to Ali Mazrui, Africans have a tendency of what he refers to as “a short memory of hate” (Nussbuan 2003: 23).

balance between self and other, the destructive and the creative, good and bad. In seeking to build peace, it shifts from thinking of social relation in dualistic oppositions, whether it is an either/or situation, good versus bad, or self versus other. The purpose of Ubuntu then is to work towards a situation that acknowledges a mutually beneficial condition. As proposed by M. Muchie (1989: 25) “if one only sees ones interest and ignores others also have the right to theirs, this will not lead to forging common points and collaborative contexts”.

Concrete expressions of Ubuntu in peace-making

In practice, Ubuntu is found in diverse forms³⁵ in many societies throughout Africa, though they adhere to a set of common principles. For example, in a conflict situation, according to the notion of Ubuntu, each member of the community is linked to each of the disputants, be they victims or perpetrators. If everybody is willing to acknowledge this, then people may either feel a sense of having been wronged, or a sense of responsibility for the wrong that has been committed. Due to this linkage, a law-breaking individual thus transforms his or her group into a law-breaking group. In the same way a disputing individual transforms his or her group into a disputing group. It therefore follows that if an individual is wronged, he or she may depend on the group to remedy the wrong, because in a sense the group has also been wronged (Murithi, 2006: 29).

Similarly, traditionally following a war between two ethnic groupings, war healers from each side would together arrange for a cleansing ceremony involving those who fought on both sides. They believed that because people had died, ancestors on both sides would be aggrieved, and the hands and hearts and spirits of the killer on each side needed to be cleanse. According to Barbara Nussbaum (2003: 22) “it is a mature and profound skill that demonstrates an in-built capacity for reconciliation and healing, after war”. The value of such ceremonies is that they serve to remind people of their common humanity and reduce the build up of vengeful feelings.

On a concrete level a typical Ubuntu process³⁶ may pass through the following five stages: Firstly, there is a fact-finding process where the views of victims,

³⁵ See Birgit Brock-Utne for examples of other Ubuntu-based conflict-solving methods such as Palaver, Mato Oput, ujamaa and kujitegemea. See also Dani Nabudere.

³⁶ This traditional peacemaking process covered offences across the board from family and marriage disputes, theft, and damage to property, murder and wars. In the more difficult cases involving murder, *Ubuntu* societies sought to avoid the death penalty because, based on the society’s view of itself - as *people through other people* - the death penalty would only serve to cause injury to the society as a whole. Though it would be more difficult to move beyond such cases, the emphasis would still be on restoring the broken relationships caused by the death of a member of the community (Murthi 2006: 32).

perpetrators and witnesses are heard, the perpetrators - if considered to have done wrong - would be encouraged, both by the Council of Elders and other community members in the forum, to acknowledge responsibility or guilt; secondly, perpetrators would be encouraged to demonstrate genuine remorse or to repent; thirdly, perpetrators would be encouraged to ask for forgiveness and victims in turn would be encouraged to show mercy; Fourthly, where possible and at the suggestion of the Council of Elders, perpetrators would be required to pay an appropriate compensation or reparation³⁷ for the wrong done. Amnesty could thus be granted, though not with impunity; the fifth stage would seek to consolidate the whole process by encouraging the parties to commit themselves to reconciliation. This process of reconciliation tended to include the victim and his or her family members and friends as well as the perpetrator and his or her family members and friends. Both groups would be encouraged to embrace co-existence and to work towards healing the relationship between them and thus contribute towards restoring harmony within the community, which was vital in ensuring the integrity and viability of the society. The act of reconciliation was vital in that it symbolised the willingness of the parties to move beyond the psychological bitterness that had prevailed in the minds of the parties during the conflict situation (Murithi 2006: 30).

Traditionally the Elders, led by a chief, played an important part in diffusing tensions and conflict, in a mediation setting where the Elders represented the norms and values of society, especially moral values (Nabudere:11). A typical feature of their participation may be characterised as the following. A good chief listens to the group and finds the point of consensus. He would play a low key role, listen to all viewpoints, facilitate debate, and finally summarise and make a decision that is just, preserve dignity and reflects the group consensus. This process is enshrined in the phrase; “a chief is a chief by the people” underlying the traditional way in which leaders, by listening to people, understood the place of common good (Nussbuan, 2003: 22).

Essentially this notion of Ubuntu sheds light on the importance of peacemaking through the principles of reciprocity, exclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples. It provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. It provides a rationale for sacrificing or letting go of the desire to take revenge for past wrongs. It provides an inspiration and suggests guidelines for societies and their governments, on how to legislate and establish laws which will promote reconciliation (Murithi 2006: 29). It is these and other aspects of Ubuntu philosophy which gives rise to its potential as an indigenous framework for building more equitable forms of political, social and economic relationships in Africa and beyond.

³⁷ This was often more symbolic than a re-payment in-kind, with the primary function of reinforcing the remorse of the perpetrators.

Some Ubuntu-based African Initiatives

The principle of Ubuntu, as a peace-building device, has been brought to the world's attention as an important element of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, in 1994. According to the African National Congress (ANC) in its January 8th 2007 statement, Ubuntu "acknowledges the truism that no person is an island, but an integral part of broader society and humankind and therefore that our individual fortunes are intimately connected to the fortunes of the whole".

To date many initiatives based on Ubuntu principles are being developed and implemented to meet the objectives of Africa's renewal projects. In light of the continuance of violent conflicts, a series of proposals has been tabled, including long term regional peace-building initiatives, mediation, the broadening of participation through participatory processes, engendering debate and support for civil society organisations, especially those advocating peace and so forth. Essentially to use dialogue as a powerful tool, instead of violence, to solve conflict.

At the peace-building level, governments in conflict situations have been urged to consider appointing special mediators or special commissions to build confidence and to recommend practical solutions. This also includes better regional mechanisms to mediate disputes before they erupt into open warfare. In some regions the response has been to establish a Council of Elders that is used to diffuse conflict before their reach crisis points.³⁸

In 2003, traditional chiefs, at the first conference of traditional leaders, pledged their support for initiatives for peace and development through the African Union (AU) and within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Harsch 2004: 12). There is evidence that traditional means of resolving conflict has continued even where it is perceived to be absent. For example, It is noteworthy that after the collapse of the state in Somalia, the elders have played a key role in negotiating peace processes in different parts of the country. The traditional leaders and urban members of Somali civil society have been instrumental in relatively stabilising the country for the last decade (Abdulkadir 2004: 1).

In Ethiopia 2007, a two-year political deadlock, between the ruling Government and Opposition, was solved when a nonpartisan Ethiopian "council of elders" was able to quickly negotiate a deal acceptable to both parties in the conflict.

³⁸ See Africa Recovery, Building Peace in West Africa, Vol.18 1 (April 2004) for an Interview with Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Executive Secretary of Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS).

Clemency was granted to previously jailed opposition leaders, in exchange for an admission of guilt and promise to respect the rule of law. Accordingly Professor Ephraim Isaac, in the role of an Elder, explained that “In our tradition there is forgiveness and elders mediate and we do not believe in grudge and vengeance”,... this is a very rich culture. There is some confidence that the release of the leaders will mark the beginning of a new chapter in Ethiopian politics and Ethiopia's ancient tradition of mediation in resolving the political crisis, was given credit for this, by the local media (Halpern 2007).

The experience with traditional peace building in Somaliland also helps to illustrate the importance of local peace-building initiatives. While most of Somalia was in a state of war, traditional reconciliation mechanisms in the northern part of the country, in Somaliland’ led to the successful re-establishment of peace and security in the region. Important elements in the peace process have been the peace agreements and the important role of the traditional Elders-*Akils*- and the Council of Elders- *Guurti* (Ahmed Yusuf Farah: 139 in ReyCheler & Paffenholz: 2001).

With regards to economic initiatives, governments have been urged to foster inter-ethnic business ventures, with parliaments taking a lead in establishing national economic committees comprising business and local leaders to ensure that economic imbalances are not exacerbated and that new private enterprises improve the existing inequitable distribution of resources (Nyamu1998:2). Here it is worth noting that the concept of “social capital” which is increasingly being analysed and used by economists and other development policy practitioners, has some resonance with traditional ethos of Ubuntu. For example, where social capital refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit, this can be understood as an expression of community life and collective responsibility of Ubuntu’s “I am because you exists” philosophy.

With regards to governance there has been various initiatives to strengthened civil society and to help in the process of good governance, the African Peer review Mechanism (APRM) was conceptualised by NEPAD as the cornerstone of enhancing the notion of good governance, whereby participating countries agree to voluntarily submit their governance performance to review by other Africans, a socialising tool to popularise and encourage the spread of good governance practices. The peer reviews have also provided scope for non-governmental actors to assess their own leaders’ performance and recommend further reforms (Harsch 2004: 11). In some countries traditional chiefs are coming forward to offer assistance in helping to promote developmental efforts in Africa’s countryside where the state is particularly weak. Accordingly Mr. Patekile, the President of Traditional Leaders of South Africa stated that

traditional leaders and their structures must be taken on board and that their special status in African life must be used to enhance the legitimacy of development projects (ibid: 12). This initiatives and the renewed quest for peace and prosperity illustrate that at the economic, political and social level, there is an abundance of indigenous philosophical and practical resources on which to devise and plan for Africa's renewal.

Conclusion

The prevalence of conflicts in Africa and the sub-region has distracted it from concentrating on its quest for peace and greater prosperity. There is also now a growing recognition that the primary responsibility for resolving conflicts in Africa lies with the Africans, themselves, and that the continent must look beyond its colonial past for the causes of current conflicts and look at itself. It is also desirable whenever possible that the international community should strive to complement rather than supplant African efforts to resolve African problems. In this way it allows for the incorporation of elements from the West but which must be based on African roots. This therefore calls for a revival of African cultural attitudes and values that can foster a climate within which peace can flourish.

We have seen how indigenous traditional methods based on the concept of Ubuntu can become a powerful and innovative framework for building effective institutions in the social, economic and political sphere of African life. However this innate willingness to forgive and reconcile has been suppressed and undermined for many years of occupation and intrusion from the West and its eclipse has darkened the spirit of modern day African political systems whereby African political leaders have betrayed the philosophical and humanitarian principles on which African culture is based. The rejuvenation of the philosophy of Ubuntu is therefore important because it provides Africans with a sense of self-identity, self-respect and achievement. In essence, it enables Africans to deal with their problems in a positive manner by drawing on humanistic values they have inherited and perpetuated throughout their history (Nabudere: 2).

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